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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PHUM KWMN PREL KPAO MA

SUBJECT: MADAGASCAR NOMINATES INTERNATIONAL WOMEN OF COURAGE

REF: STATE 2502148

¶1. Per reftel, Post nominates the following two candidates from Madagascar for the International Women of Courage Award.

¶2. Dr. Mathilde Rabary is the National President of the non-governmental organization (NGO) "S.O.S. to Human Rights Victims," Coordinator of the Mifohaza Center, and a former Member of Madagascar's National Assembly.

a. Date of Birth: December 7, 1943
b. Country of Birth: Madagascar
c. Citizenship: Madagascar
d. Address: II H 3 Iadiambola Ampasampito Antananarivo 101, MADAGASCAR
e. Telephone: +(261) 202240397, +(261) 320241901
f. Email: rabary@moov.mg
g. Passport Number: Post will update
h. Justification:

Dr. Mathilde Rabary currently serves as President of the nation-wide NGO "S.O.S. to Human Rights Victims," created in 1999 to assist victims of human rights abuses and educate Malagasy citizens regarding their rights. In 2003, in collaboration with women law graduates in Fianarantsoa, the NGO opened Madagascar's first legal clinic -- "Mifohaza" or "Wake Up" -- to counsel primarily women on their inheritance, family/domestic, and work rights. The center has had resounding success, handling over 2,000 cases per year. She and her legal experts travel around the country, sometimes even taking pirogues into villages, to raise public awareness of human rights and handle cases ranging from domestic violence to land title issues to torture under interrogation. This is no small feat in Madagascar, one of the poorest countries in the world where communication and transportation outside urban areas ranges from difficult to nearly impossible. In a country where the judiciary system is weak and corruption is endemic, Dr. Rabary provides an invaluable service. She is a vocal advocate for human rights and does not hesitate to call out government officials at all levels for dragging their feet in addressing human rights violations.

A medical doctor by profession, Dr. Rabary's distinguished career fighting for the protection and promotion of human rights in Madagascar has also included experience working within the government and civil society. Her work for the government included two years as Director of Well-Being of Families and Children at the Ministry of Population (1994 to 1996) and four years as a member of the National Assembly (1998 to 2002). She has also taught human rights at the School of Nursing and Midwifery since 1995.

She began to take her fight to protect human rights international in 2002 by filing a lawsuit at the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights against violations of human rights in Madagascar; UNESCO nominated her for the Peace Prize in 2003. In the same year, she also initiated the first international colloquium on human rights in the Indian Ocean. She spoke before the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in Geneva in 2004 regarding racial intolerance in Madagascar and represented Malagasy civil

society before the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in 2007 regarding situations of torture in Madagascar.

Dr. Rabary was notified of her nomination.

¶3. Armine Razanamahefaarivony is the National President of the "Djamaat des Femmes Musulmanes," a Muslim women's association.

- a. Date of Birth: July 20, 1952
- b. Country of Birth: Madagascar
- c. Citizenship: Madagascar
- d. Address: Lot IV0 93 bis Isotry, Ambodin'isotry, Antananarivo, MADAGASCAR
- e. Telephone: +(261) 32 047 0033
- f. Email: None
- g. Passport Number: Lost, currently reapplying for a new copy.
- h. Justification:

One of the Mission's priorities is conducting outreach to the Muslim minority community, which comprises ten percent of the nation's population. There is very little cooperation between the different groups in Madagascar's Muslim community. Those who are economically disadvantaged are often forced to look outside the religious community for assistance - a major feat in a country where 70 percent of the population lives below the poverty line. Muslims experience social discrimination in general, and some Muslim women complain of considerable discrimination from the men in their own communities.

Faced with these challenges, Armine Razanamahefaarivony is a tireless advocate of Muslim women's rights within Madagascar. In 2001, she created "Djamaat des Femmes Musulmanes," an NGO dedicated to promoting women's rights within the Muslim community and empowering Muslim women by finding practical ways to help them out of poverty. Her efforts to educate and empower women have faced considerable resistance from the men in her Sunni Muslim community; she has been asked to leave a number of religious meetings and has been criticized for pushing women to be too "headstrong." Still, her organization has had some significant successes. For many years, some traditional Sunni mosques did not allow women to enter, much less speak or participate publicly. Following persistent lobbying and education on Razanamahefaarivony's part, starting in 2005 all Sunni mosques are now open and accessible to women.

Armine Razanamahefaarivony was notified of her nomination.

¶3. Post appreciates the Department's consideration of these two nominations.

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